

Calaveras Big Trees State Park



Our Mission

The mission of California State Parks is to provide for the health, inspiration and education of the people of California by helping to preserve the state's extraordinary biological diversity, protecting its most valued natural and cultural resources, and creating opportunities for high-quality outdoor recreation.



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SaveTheRedwoods.org/csp

Calaveras Big Trees State Park

1170 East Highway 4

Arnold, CA 95223

(209) 795-2334

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*It is unlikely that
anyone could look upon
the Sequoiadendron
giganteum and not
feel a sense of awe
and reverence.*



Three miles north of Arnold off Highway 4, the colossal trees of Calaveras Big Trees State Park stand in quiet testimony to prehistoric times. These massive relics, which can reach a height of 325 feet and a diameter of 33 feet, are descended from trees that were standing when dinosaurs roamed Earth, and birds, mammals and flowering plants began to appear. Some of today's trees are thought to be as old as 2,000 years.

Located at the mid-elevation level of the western Sierra Nevada, Calaveras Big Trees State Park is a prime example of a mixed conifer forest in the yellow pine belt. Giant sequoias dominate ponderosa pines, sugar pines, incense cedars and white fir. The Pacific dogwood displays white blossoms in the spring, and wildflowers along the Lava Bluffs Trail include leopard lily, Hartweg's iris, crimson columbine, monkey-flowers, harvest brodiaea, wild hyacinth and lupine.

NATIVE PEOPLE

Though some native groups saw the trees as sacred and untouchable, the Miwok respected them and made careful use of them. These skilled fishermen, trappers

and hunters built their seasonal villages alongside the flourishing rivers of the Sierra Nevada foothills. The acorns and other seeds the Miwok harvested in the fall were a vital part of their diet. Their way of life was rich in ceremony and social activity, including the important harvesting and grinding of the fall acorn crop. Throughout this area, large granite outcroppings and boulders with groups of mortar holes bear witness to the Miwok method of grinding seeds and acorns. Today, approximately 3,500 Miwok descendants live in the area.

PARK HISTORY

In the spring of 1852, Augustus T. Dowd was tracking a wounded grizzly bear through unfamiliar territory when he came upon a forest of enormous trees. The giant sequoia that first caught his attention was the largest in what is now the Calaveras North Grove. At first, Dowd's description of what he had seen was considered a "tall tale" until he led a group of men to the grove. Word of the giant sequoia grove's existence spread rapidly. Newspapers picked up the story, bringing curious visitors and entrepreneurs eager to make their fortunes from naive spectators.



Pioneer Cabin Tree

The Discovery Tree that had earlier stopped Dowd in his tracks was the first casualty in the rush to exploit the giant sequoias. It took five men 22 days to cut it down. Sections of bark and a portion of its trunk were shipped to San Francisco to be placed on display. Later it was sent around Cape Horn to New York City, where it was considered a "humbug" by many who saw it. The financially unsuccessful showing closed, and while the tree's artifacts were awaiting shipment to Paris, a fire destroyed the entire exhibit. The Discovery Tree's stump remains in the North Grove.

Further depredations continued in the North Grove. A magnificent tree named the "Mother of the Forest" was stripped of nearly 60 tons of its bark to a height of 116 feet. The bark was sent to the East Coast and abroad for exhibition. In 1861 the Mammoth Grove Hotel was built in the North Grove. The resort hotel operated until 1943, when it was destroyed by a fire.



THE TREES

Two types of redwood trees are native to California—the coast redwood along the central and northern coast and the giant sequoia, which appears in scattered locations along the western slope of the Sierra Nevada. Conservationist John Muir was concerned that these giants, which had survived the Ice Age and the ravages of time, were “rapidly vanishing before the fire and steel of man . . .” In 1878, after a protracted battle over ownership was settled, the Calaveras property was sold at public auction. The winning bid, from James L. Sperry, was \$15,000. In 1900 Mr. Sperry sold out to lumberman Robert Whiteside, raising great public protest. Whiteside declined offers from federal legislators hoping to establish a national park at

Calaveras, and the struggle to acquire and protect the groves stretched over the next three decades.

During this time, the Calaveras Grove Association was formed. It was inspired by the Sierra Club and the Save the Redwoods League, which were leading a movement to establish a system of California state parks. Widespread public concern for the trees was beginning to have a positive effect.

THE NORTH GROVE

In 1928 Californians voted to establish a state park system through a bond act. Private donors supporting the acquisition of the North Grove included John D. Rockefeller, Jr., and Mrs. William H. Crocker. The rest of the funding came from the Calaveras Grove Association and the Save the Redwoods League. At last, in 1931, the North Grove

came under the protection of the State of California. Now all that was left was to find a way to acquire the South Grove.

THE SOUTH GROVE

Unfortunately, the world was then in the throes of the Great Depression. Newton B. Drury, acting as Land Acquisition Officer for the California Division of Beaches and Parks, decided against the acquisition, citing “the condition of the state park bond fund . . . and the difficulty in raising private gifts.”

It took another 23 years before the South Grove was acquired. These years were rocked by two wars, with on-again/off-again negotiations with the Pickering Lumber Company, revival of the defunct Calaveras Grove Association, and a massive grassroots fundraising campaign to preserve the quality of this untouched forest. Finally, on April 16, 1954, the Calaveras South Grove became part of Calaveras Big Trees State Park.

RECREATION

Camping—The North Grove Campground has 74 campsites; the Oak Hollow Campground has 55 campsites. Both can accommodate tents and RVs up to 30 feet. All campsites have fire rings and picnic tables; piped water, flush toilets and coin showers are nearby. Visit www.parks.ca.gov or call (800) 444-7275 for reservations.

Trails—The North Grove has a level, 1.5-mile self-guided trail. The 600-foot Three Senses Trail allows visitors to experience the feel, smell and sounds of this magnificent forest. The five-mile South Grove Trail travels along Big Trees Creek and passes the park’s



Giant sequoia trees on the North Grove Trail



A park Junior Ranger learns about wildlife by handling a coyote skin.

two largest trees—the Agassiz Tree and the Palace Hotel Tree. The fairly strenuous four-mile River Canyon Trail runs between the North Grove and the Stanislaus River. Along the Lava Bluffs Trail, hikers can enjoy the scenic North Fork of the Stanislaus River.

Picnicking/Swimming—Designated picnic areas are located alongside the Stanislaus River, in the North Grove, Oak Leaf Spring and Beaver Creek areas.

Fishing—The Stanislaus River and Beaver Creek offer good fishing, particularly for rainbow trout. A valid California fishing license is required.

Wildlife—Opportunities for wildlife observation are abundant in the park. Bird species include pileated woodpeckers, northern flickers, Steller's jays and dark-eyed juncos. Raccoons, foxes, porcupines, chipmunks, chickarees and flying squirrels

are among the native animals. Black bears, bobcats and coyotes are sometimes seen.

ACCESSIBLE FEATURES

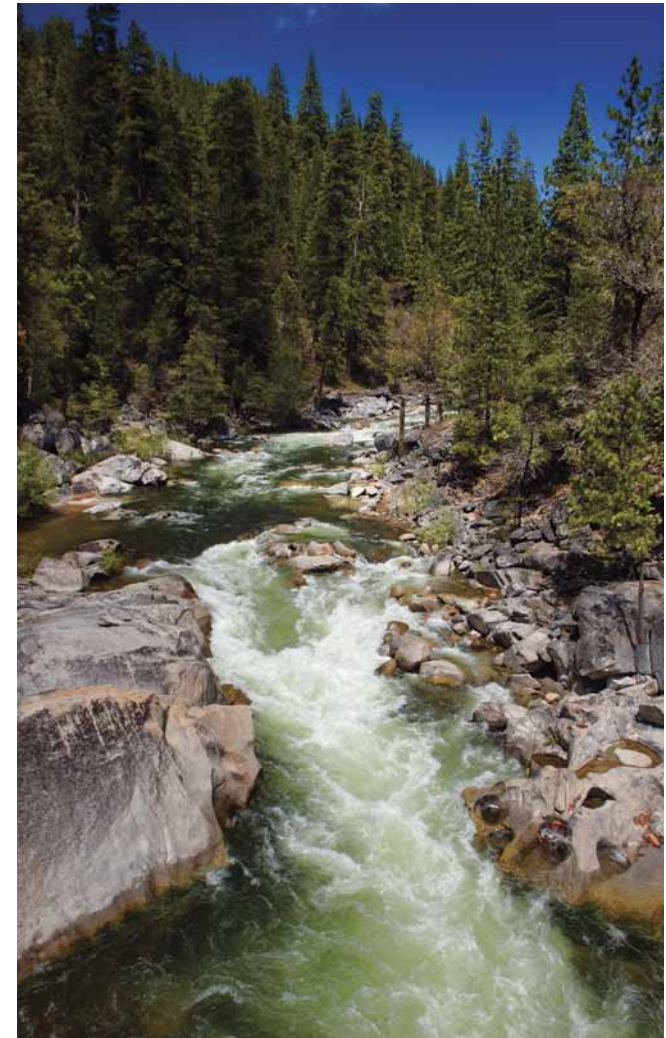
- Campsites and restrooms with showers at the North Grove Campground—some visitors may need help with sloped terrain;
- One campsite and restroom with showers at the Oak Hollow Campground;
- Wheelchair seating spaces, parking, assistive listening system at the Campfire Center;
- Parking and exhibits at the Visitor Center—assistance may be needed at entry;
- Parking and .13-mile rope-guided Three Senses Trail (Braille text included); and
- Restroom and adjacent parking near warming hut off North Grove parking lot.
- The North Grove and Beaver Creek trails and the River Picnic Area are all accessible. Accessibility is continually improving. For current accessibility details, call the park or visit <http://access.parks.ca.gov>.

PLEASE REMEMBER

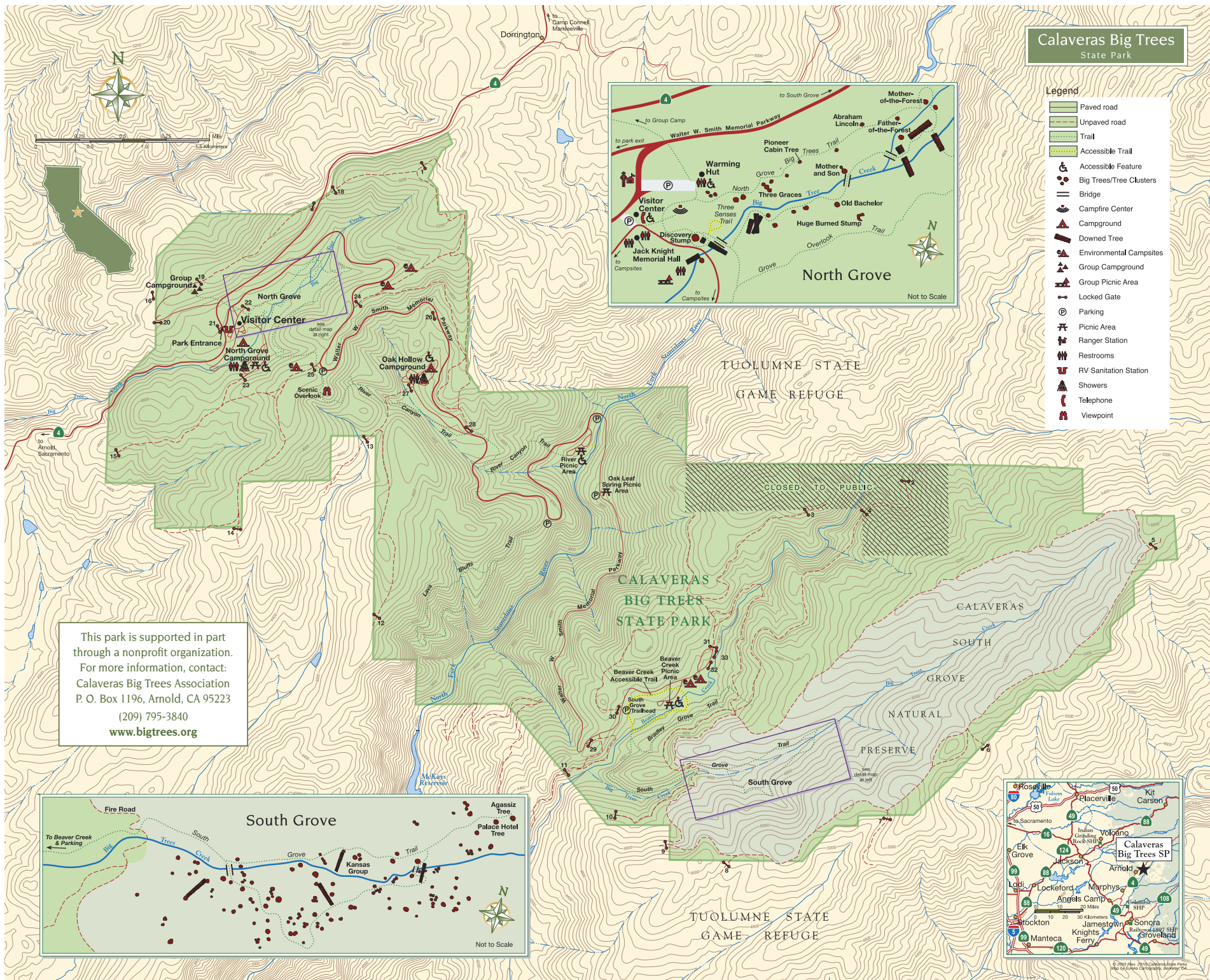
- Do not feed the bears and other wildlife that inhabit the park; secure all food and scented items in the bear-resistant locker day and night when not in use.
- Diving is not permitted anywhere in the park; lifeguards are not available.
- Be careful with fire in the park.
- All natural and cultural features in the park are protected by law. Please do not disturb or remove them.
- Dogs must be on a leash no more than six feet long and are allowed only in the campgrounds and on fire roads; they are not permitted on trails (except for service dogs).

NEARBY STATE PARKS

- Columbia State Historic Park
3 miles north of Sonora off Hwy. 49
(209) 588-9128
- Indian Grinding Rock State Historic Park
11 miles northeast of Jackson on Pine Grove-Volcano Road (209) 296-7488
- Railtown 1897 State Historic Park
In Jamestown on 5th Avenue, off Hwy. 108 (209) 984-3953



The Stanislaus River



Calaveras Big Trees State Park

- Legend
- Paved road
 - Unpaved road
 - Trail
 - Accessible Trail
 - Accessible Feature
 - Big Trees/Tree Clusters
 - Bridge
 - Campfire Center
 - Campground
 - Downed Tree
 - Environmental Campsites
 - Group Campground
 - Group Picnic Area
 - Locked Gate
 - Parking
 - Picnic Area
 - Ranger Station
 - Restrooms
 - RV Sanitation Station
 - Showers
 - Telephone
 - Viewpoint

This park is supported in part through a nonprofit organization. For more information, contact: Calaveras Big Trees Association P. O. Box 1196, Arnold, CA 95223 (209) 795-3840 www.bigtrees.org

